

ONE DOLLAR A YEAR.

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## Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac

A Critical History of Operations in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania from the Commencement to the Close of the War, 1861-1865.

By WILLIAM SWINTON.

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### "STRIDE OF A GIANT."

Transfer of the Army of the Potomac to the Peninsula—Strategy of the Opposing Commanders—Opening the Campaign—Fishes and Bluffs for McClellan—Sumner's Mistake—Forcing the Line of the Warwick River.

To take up an army of over 100,000 men, transport it and all its immense material by water, and plant it down on a new theater of action nearly 200 miles distant, is an enterprise the details of which must be studied ere its colossal magnitude can be adequately apprehended. (1) It was an undertaking eminently characteristic of the American genius, and of a people distinguished above all others for the ease with which it executes great material enterprises—a people rich in resources and in the faculty of creating resources. Yet, when one reflects that at the time the order was given to provide transportation for the army to the Peninsula—the 27th of February, 1862—this had first of all to be created; and when one learns that in a little over a month from that date there had been chartered and assembled no fewer than 400 steamers and sailing craft, and that upon them had been transported from Alexandria and Washington to Fortress Monroe an army of 121,500 men, 14,592 animals, 44 batteries, the wagons and ambulances, pontoon-trains, telegraph materials, and enormous equipment required for an army of such magnitude, and that all this had been done with the loss of but eight mules and nine barges (the cargoes of which were saved), an intelligent verdict must certainly second the assertion of the Assistant Secretary of War, Mr. Tucker, whose administrative talent, in concert with Gen. McClellan, directed this vast undertaking, that "for economy and celerity of movement, this expedition was without a parallel on record." An European critic calls it "the stride of a giant"—and it well deserves that characterization.

The van of the grand army was led by Hamilton's—afterward Kearny's—division of the Third Corps (Heintzelman's), which embarked for Fortress Monroe on the 17th of March. It was followed by Porter's Division on the 22d, and the other divisions took their departure on the 24th. Transports could be supplied. Gen. McClellan reached Fortress Monroe on the 2d of April, and by that time there had arrived five divisions of infantry, three regiments of cavalry, the artillery division, and artillery reserve—making in all 58,000 men and 100 guns. This force was at once put in motion in the direction of Yorktown. The first of these auxiliaries was the navy, by the aid of whose powerful armament he designed to demolish the water-batteries at Yorktown and Gloucester Point, and then push a force upon West Point, at the head of the York River, thus turning the line of defenses on the Warwick. But, upon applying to Flag-Officer Goldsborough for the cooperation of his navy, he was informed by that officer that no naval force could be spared for that purpose, since he regarded the works as too strong for his available vessels. (3)

UNAVAILABLE ALTERNATIVE PLAN. The second project was to land a heavy force in the rear of Gloucester Point, turn Yorktown by that method, and opening up the York River. This task he had assigned to McDowell's Corps, which was to be the last to embark at Alexandria, and which he had executed in operation in case the army found itself brought to a halt by the peninsula defenses. But on the very day on which the army arrived before Yorktown, Gen. McClellan was met by an order (4) of the President, to which reference has already been made, detaching McDowell's Corps from his command, and retaining it in front of Washington.

NEARLY READY TO RUN. So soon as his antagonist's movement had become fully developed, Gen. Johnston put his army in motion from the Hampton Roads, where it was a mere kept it in hand. The Confederate leader did not expect to hold the Peninsula; for both he and Gen. Lee, who then held the position of chief of staff to Mr. Davis, pronounced it untenable. Soon after the advent of the Union army, Gen. Johnston

went down to Yorktown, examined its line of defenses, and urged the military authorities at Richmond to withdraw the force from the Peninsula. Assuming that the Federal commander would, with the aid of the navy, reduce the fort at Yorktown, thus opening up the York River, and by means of his numerous fleet of transports, pass rapidly to the head of the Peninsula, Johnston regarded the capture of any force remaining thereon as almost certain. The works at Yorktown he found very defective (though the position was naturally strong); for, owing to the paucity of engineers, resulting from the employment of so many of this class of officers in other arms, they had been constructed under the direction of civil and railroad engineers. In this state of facts, Gen. Johnston wished to withdraw everything from the Peninsula, effect a general concentra-

tion of all available forces around Richmond, and there deliver decisive battle. (2) These views were, however, overruled, and it was determined to hold Yorktown, at least until Huger should have dismantled the fortifications at Norfolk, destroyed the naval establishment, and evacuated the sea-coast. Under cover of a heavy artillery fire from 18 guns, under Capt. Ayres, four companies of Vermont troops passed the creek, by wading breast-deep, and carried the rifle-batteries held by the Confederates as an advanced line. Here they were reinforced by eight additional companies. The enemy, upon being driven from the line, retired to a redoubt in the rear, and there receiving reinforcement, made a counter charge on the handful of Union troops, who were driven across the creek, after holding the rifle pits for an hour, and were unsupported. Many were killed and wounded in recrossing the stream. (6) No subsequent attempt was made to break the Confederate line.

THOUGHT THAT WAS DISCOVERED about the center of the line, near Lee's Mill, where there was a dam covered by a battery; and with the view of determining strength of this position, Gen. W. F. Smith, commanding the Second Division of the Fourth Corps, was ordered to push a strong reconnaissance over the "Warwick" at that point. Under cover of a heavy artillery fire from 18 guns, under Capt. Ayres, four companies of Vermont troops passed the creek, by wading breast-deep, and carried the rifle-batteries held by the Confederates as an advanced line. Here they were reinforced by eight additional companies. The enemy, upon being driven from the line, retired to a redoubt in the rear, and there receiving reinforcement, made a counter charge on the handful of Union troops, who were driven across the creek, after holding the rifle pits for an hour, and were unsupported. Many were killed and wounded in recrossing the stream. (6) No subsequent attempt was made to break the Confederate line.

It now remained to undertake the siege of the uninvested fortifications of Yorktown—a task to which the army at once settled down. Depots were established at Shipping Point, to which place supplies were brought direct by water; and indeed it was necessary to have land transportation as much as possible—the roads being so few and so bad as to necessitate the construction of an immense amount of corduroy highway. The first parallel was opened at about a mile from Yorktown, and under its protection, batteries were established almost simultaneously along the whole front, extending from York River on the right to the Warwick on the left, along a cord of about one mile in length. In all, 14 batteries and three redoubts, fully armed, and including some unusually heavy metal, such as 100- and 200-pounders, were erected to operate in the reduction of the earthworks. The batteries as completed were, with a single exception (7) not allowed to open, as it was believed that the return fire would interfere with the labor on other works. It was preferred to wait till the preparations should be complete, and then open a simultaneous and overwhelming bombardment. This period would have been reached by the 10th of May at latest. The artillery and engineer officers judged that a very few hours' fire would compel the surrender or evacuation of the works; but, to the chagrin of the professional opinion to the practical test, for it was discovered on the 4th of May that the Confederates had evacuated Yorktown. (8) The retreat had been managed with the same mastery skill that marked the evacuation of Manassas; and the Army of the Potomac, cheated of its anticipated brilliant passage at arms, came into possession only of the deserted works and some three-score and ten siege guns, that the Confederates had been obliged to leave as the price of their un molested retreat.

DISCUSSION OF THE PLANS. In the preceding outline of the siege of Yorktown, I have confined myself to a simple recital of events. It is well known, however, that no portion of Gen. McClellan's military career has given rise to a greater amount of criticism, or criticism

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professional nature, that the interference of civilians in the war-councils of a nation must commonly be disastrous. The President who found himself by virtue of his office made Commander-in-Chief of all the forces of the United States, and who had, since the supersession of McClellan as General-in-Chief, assumed a species of general direction of the war, had passed his life in the arena of politics; and he brought the habits of a politician to affairs in which, unfortunately, their intrusion can only result in a confusion of all just relations. This antagonism between the maxims that govern politics and those that govern military affairs, is strikingly illustrated in a sentence of one of Mr. Lincoln's dispatches to Gen. McClellan about this time. Referring to McDowell's force, he repeated requests that McDowell's force should be sent him, the President says: "I shall aid you all I can consistently with my view of due regard to all points." (5) Nothing could be more ingenious than this avowal of the policy of an equitable distribution of favors. But, however discreet the course may be in politics, it is fatal in war, and is precisely that once-honored Austrian principle of "covering everything, by which one really covers nothing." War is partial and imperious, and in place of having "regard to all points," neglects many points to accumulate all on the decisive point. The decisive point in the case under discussion was assuredly with the Army of the Potomac confronting the main force of the enemy. The proof of this was not long in declaring itself.

2. This exposition of the views and counsels of Gen. Johnston I derive from himself. It is noteworthy that McClellan expected to do precisely what his antagonist did not expect to do—reduce Yorktown by the aid of the navy, and give general battle before Richmond.

3. McClellan: Report, p. 79. It is due to say, that Commodore Goldsborough professed the cooperation of a naval force, provided Gloucester Point should be first turned by the army. Report on the Conduct of the War, p. 632.

4. This order, dated April 4, and received April 5, is as follows: "ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S OFFICE, 'April 4, 1862. "By direction of the President, Gen. McDowell's Army Corps has been detached from the force under your immediate command, and the General is ordered to report to the Secretary of War. Letter by mail. E. T. DICKENS, Adjutant-General."

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